

Spring Cleaning in Congress Started in January
Rep. Lloyd Doggett

Normally, a New Year's resolution is a list you write for yourself. But the ethics package the Democrats adopted in our first day back to work was written by the American people at the ballot box in November.

Our January reform resolution was possible only because of that November revolution by voters, who were, quite frankly, revolted by what they saw going on here in Washington. In Congress, "spring cleaning" started in January.

No More Business as Usual

We banned lobbyist-sponsored junkets and gifts and the use of corporate jets from jet-setting lobbyists. We also will increase transparency on how federal money is spent. In Congress, an earmark is too often a secret means by which Members can funnel federal dollars to special projects. Some are worthwhile, some are dubious.

Ranchers know a different "earmark" - a mark on the ear used to identify cattle. By their very nature, earmarks are public, designed to identify ownership. We need some of this Texas thinking in Washington. If earmarks can identify a steer, we are able to know through this new package of reforms, who is steering earmarks of federal tax dollars to some unworthy cause.

Reform Is An Ongoing Process

Ethics reform though is not an end in itself. The goal of reform is to improve the substance of the work we do here. It is to ensure that our priorities in Washington are genuinely the priorities of hard-working families in Bastrop County.

Because fiscal security is national security, we are also working to cut the ballooning federal deficit with pay-as-you-go budgeting -- barring new spending provisions or tax changes that would increase the soaring national debt.

Our reforms seek to curb the cost of corruption. It is a cost borne in the pocketbooks of our seniors paying too much for drugs because of a plan designed by pharmaceutical manufacturers, instead of those who need help most. The cost is reflected in the no-bid contracts, in Iraq and in the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina debacle. And the cost is borne by those who cannot find the jobs they need to support their families.

Recall that about the only action these Republicans took last year to reign in "fat cats" was to say that lawmakers-turned-lobbyists could no longer use the House gym. Apparently, their thinking was, "fat cats" were not entitled to "skinny lobbyists."

"Reform," though, can never end. Just as surely as weeds will find, create, and exploit cracks in a new sidewalk, these rules too will require review after the test of time.

Accountability, so long lacking from this House, begins now.